



December 20, 2012

Travel, Recreation, Wildlife and Cultural Resources Committee

Senator Bruce Burns, Co-Chair

Representative Kathy Davison, Co-Chair

Members of Joint Travel, Recreation, Wildlife, and Cultural Resources Committee



Via U.S. Postal and email (Bruce.Burns@wyoleg.gov and Kathy.Davison@wyoleg.gov)

Re: Wildlife organizations' support of *HB0037* and *SF0032*

Dear Senator Burns, Representative Davison, and the TRWCR Committee Members:

For almost 90 years, resident and non-resident hunters and anglers have proudly shouldered the cost of funding fish and wildlife conservation and management in Wyoming. In addition to paying license fees and excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, through organizations such as those included on this letter, sportsmen and sportswomen voluntarily donate millions of dollars and thousands of hours each year toward Wyoming's fish and wildlife resource. Through the management programs of our Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), hunters, anglers, and wildlife supporters of Wyoming's wildlife resource realize a strong return on their investment. This "user-pays" approach is one of the underpinning principles of the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation, which we wholeheartedly support.

The proposed license increases approved by the TRW committee for consideration by the 2013 legislature are all well within the range of past license fee adjustments: \$14 (45%) for resident antelope, \$12 (33%) for resident deer, \$15 (30%) for resident elk, \$130 (55%) for nonresident antelope, \$170 (55%) for nonresident deer and \$75 (13%) for nonresident elk. Past license fee adjustments have been as high as 100% for nonresident antelope, deer and elk and 50-60% for residents (1980) and as low as 13% for residents (1992) and 22% for nonresidents (2008).

We are aware that the costs of all goods and services, from fuel for our vehicles to food on our table, have increased over the past five years and it's not enjoyable. However, sportsmen and wildlife enthusiasts clearly recognize the need for adequate funding to support sound fish and wildlife management into the future. We continue to willingly "pay our own way", in support of WGFD's terrestrial and aquatic programs. We do so not only in recognition of rising costs but also because of the important economic contributions to both the local and state's economies. Healthy fish and wildlife populations, and the recreational opportunities they provide, generate more than \$1.1 billion directly to Wyoming's economy and contribute significantly to the overall \$2.9 billion annual tourism industry. In addition to the economic return and job creation, well-managed wildlife populations and habitat provide the backdrop to the high quality of life which we all enjoy. Investing in wildlife just seems like a good business practice for the state's second largest and most stable industry.

Our organizations, and the tens of thousands of resident and non-resident hunters and anglers who comprise our membership and who are your constituents, want to go on record and have our citizen Legislature recognize and acknowledge our support of pending legislation dealing with WGFD license fees, indexing, and creation of a big game license "super-raffle".

Our organizations support the language and concept reflected in HB0037 that authorize creation of big game "Super Tag" and "Super Tag Trifecta" raffles. These strategies allow additional revenue to be generated, provide enhanced hunting opportunities, and are supported by a very strong majority of resident and non-resident wildlife enthusiasts. *We recommend that legislation be written that guarantees no adverse effect on existing statutorily-authorized Wyoming Governor's big game licenses.* Granting authority to the WGF Commission to further promulgate necessary Chapter 44 regulations is a positive step, provided those regulations include



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“conservation minimums” similar to language identifying in which hunt areas Governor’s bighorn sheep and moose licenses may be used.

Our organizations also support the language and concept reflected in SF0032, to adjust existing WGFD license fees, and to authorize the WGF Commission to periodically adjust license and permit fees, commensurate with Wyoming’s implicit price deflator index, with ultimate oversight by the Wyoming Legislature. Indexing would smooth out the “sticker shock” associated with periodic large increases in license fees; most state fish and game agencies currently index their license fees, and we feel strongly that WGFD should do the same.



Considering the quality of Wyoming’s fishing and big game hunting experiences, and the high hunter success enjoyed by Wyoming’s hunters when compared to surrounding states, Wyoming’s current big game license fees provide great value and opportunities most sportsmen and women recognize and appreciate. Our organizations acknowledge the proposed license fee adjustments as necessary and reasonable, in our opinion, to help pay for fish and wildlife management programs. Our members, your constituents, are largely willing to continue their investment in Wyoming’s fish and wildlife resource, and we respectfully encourage our legislative representatives to do the same.



Our organizations support and thank the Department and the Legislature for recognizing the need to establish license fees that clearly favor residents, but also acknowledge the *need to maintain ratios between non-resident and resident pricing near a 10:1 ratio for certain species that live primarily on public land* (e.g., bighorn sheep, mountain goat, moose), to avoid court challenges and legal precedents that may adversely alter Wyoming’s current license issuance system.



Collectively, our organizations view periodic license fee adjustments as only one element of what must become a comprehensive, long-term search for alternative revenue streams to support and enhance Wyoming’s fish and wildlife management. A stable, more reliable and more equitable **funding mechanism is needed to assure Wyoming’s fish and wildlife resource, and our Game and Fish Department, remain adequately funded.** Certainly, fiscal streamlining and frugal program cuts and reduced expenditures can always be improved; we are aware that WGFD has already enacted numerous program cuts and reduced expenditures over the past decade or more, and will continue that fiscal caution in FY2013, and beyond.

As hunters, anglers, and wildlife supporters have done for nearly a century, our members stand ready to do our part, short-term and long-term, to maintain the fish and wildlife resource that is highly valued by residents and non-residents alike. We appreciate your service to the State of Wyoming and look forward to being involved as the 2013 Wyoming Legislature addresses these stated needs.

Please review the following site for important and detailed information concerning the Wyoming Game and Fish Department’s funding issue - <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/wgfd-1000880.aspx>

Sincerely,

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation
Safari Club International (Central WY)
Audubon Rockies
Wyoming Trout Unlimited
National Wildlife Federation
North American Grouse Partnership

Wyoming Wildlife Federation
Muley Fanatic Foundation of Wyoming
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wyoming Federation of Union Sportsmen
Wyoming Falconers’ Association
Wyoming Outdoor Council

CC: Tony Ross, Senate President
Thomas E. Lubnau, Speaker of the House